



# ANXIOUS, EXHAUSTED & ANGRY

**NHS WORKERS SPEAK OUT >>PAGES 10&11 TORY WAGES PLAN SUBSIDISES BOSSES >>PAGE 6  
BREAK FROM CHAOS OF CAPITALISM >>PAGES 14&15**

# Socialist Worker

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## CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

# DON'T TRUST TORIES

**Bailing out the bosses ● Starving NHS of vital resources ● Giving cops dangerous new powers**

**THE TORIES are still gambling with our lives.**

They were pushed to declare a lockdown this week, but they leave in place everything that makes coronavirus spread.

They won't implement mass testing, even of NHS workers. They won't make sure the health service has vital equipment.

They allow greedy bosses to demand people come to work.

The best public health measure is to guarantee everyone's income and make sure food and medicines are distributed to all who need them.



Then people will stay at home. If you leave millions facing the sack, £94 a week sick pay or the horrors of the Universal Credit benefits regime then many of them will feel forced to go to work—even though they know it's dangerous.

We don't need more repression. We need to stop the Tories putting profits before people.

Workers fighting back in Britain and across the world have shown how to win.

We need to push Labour and the trade union leaders to start fighting too.

### BRITAIN AND LIBYA

**A conspiracy based on bribery and torture**

HASHEM ABEDI was deported to Britain after a £9.2 million grant to Libya and after he was held in a torture centre.

Officers from MI5 and MI6 visited him there twice when he was being tortured.

The British government was complicit in his torture while Boris Johnson was foreign secretary.

**>>Page 16**

### ANTI-RACISM



**New Windrush reports shows Tories' racism**

THE TORIES' treatment of the Windrush generation of migrants was "consistent with some elements" of institutional racism, according to an official report.

The long-delayed Windrush Lessons Learned review, said the scandal was "foreseeable and avoidable".

**>>Page 7**

### IDEAS

**The 'national interest' is not workers' interest**

THE TORIES talk of everyone "pulling together" against coronavirus. They hope this will unite everyone behind a government that's only out for the rich.

We need workers' unity against the Tories, not unity with them.

**>>Page 15**



## THE THINGS THEY SAY

**'Even hardcore socialism usually stopped short of calling for the government to take on the payroll of private sector employers. Now it's Tory policy'**

Guardian newspaper columnist **Jonathan Freedland** on Tory pledges on wages

**'There are no free-marketeers in a pandemic'**

Freedland continues

**'I guess, I haven't even asked, that Mar-a-lago is closed down'**

Donald Trump claimed not to know if his Florida resort was shut. It was—with staff sacked

**'Massive disincentives for people to work'**

Tory **Iain Duncan Smith** on the idea of a universal basic income—while millions suffer

**'It's inevitable that looting might occur. We have to be prepared'**

Buenos Aires province security minister **Sergio Berni** gets his priorities straight

# Never mind the coronavirus, what about the bottom line?

THE TORIES would like us to believe we are "all in it together" in the battle to beat coronavirus.

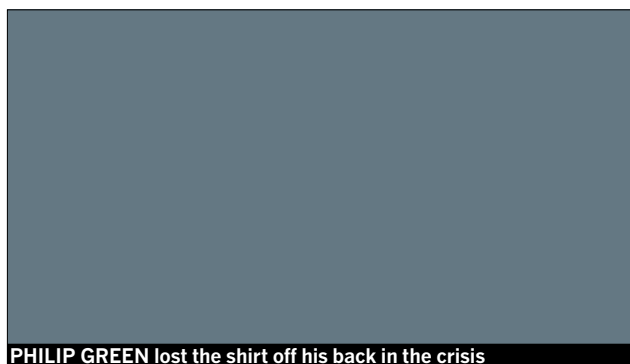
But the bosses have other priorities.

Topshop workers were laid off with no redundancy money after Arcadia Group closed its 300 UK stores an hour before the government announced that it would guarantee some workers' wages.

Eleanor Cerys tweeted, "No sick pay, redundancy, nothing."

"The amount of tears I've seen this week is disgusting. Seeing my managers having to let all temporary contracts end and now this."

Topshop owner Philip Green, has a personal fortune of £950 million. Yet he's threatening to refuse to pay the full rents on his shops.



PHILIP GREEN lost the shirt off his back in the crisis

Elsewhere, Troublemaker regular hedge fund tycoon Crispin Odey has made around £115 million from this month's stock market crash.

Odey revealed that his bets on plunging share prices had netted him a fortune.

The investor friend of Boris Johnson said his hedge fund was 12 percent down for the year at the end of February.

But huge falls in share prices since then have meant he made that back and left him 20 percent up, adding an extra £115 million to the funds he manages.

Odey—thought to be worth about £775 million—hit the headlines in 2012 after spending £150,000 on a Palladian-style coop for his chickens at his mansion

in Gloucestershire. Odey said, "The big difference between now and 2008 is the machines". These are used by traders to sell automatically when the market dips.

"The machines just never stop selling when the market falls. That's why you are seeing such big moves down."

Jamie Oliver also saw a corona opportunity.

His latest ego-boosting money making, sorry public service, is a new show on Channel Four called Keep Cooking and Carry On.

Since he closed a bunch of his restaurants and sacked all his staff while keeping his fortune safe, he will be the perfect host.

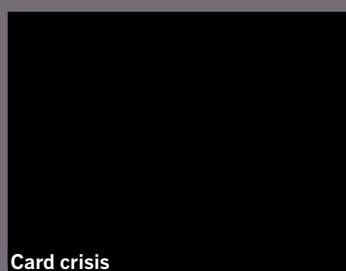
And Bono is recording a song inspired by the people singing from balconies in Italy. Perhaps it should be called pay your taxes.

● ARGENTINA'S government postponed the payment of credit card and other consumer debt in the wake of the coronavirus crisis.

Good news? Well sort of.

"The deadline for all debt with financial entities that fall due between March 20 and March 31 have been postponed until April 1," said the Central Bank.

So no long term help, then.



Card crisis

● THE CORONAVIRUS crisis has hit the gambling industry. Mass cancellation of events mean fewer things to bet on.

So the oddsmonkey firm is finding other ways for you to splash the cash. It declared Rishi Sunak "odds on" to become prime minister.

## Republicans use the crisis to attack abortion rights

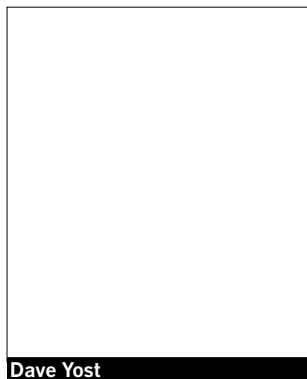
THE AUTHORITIES in Ohio are trying to use the coronavirus crisis to clamp down on a woman's right to choose.

Ohio Attorney General and Republican Dave Yost wrote to three abortion providers on Friday of last week.

He said they were "ordered to immediately stop performing non-essential and elective surgical abortions".

"Non-essential surgical abortions are those that can be delayed without undue risk to the current or future health of a patient."

Planned Parenthood of Southwest Ohio disputed this, saying the order to suspend



Dave Yost

non-essential surgery did not mention abortion.

And NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio's Kellie Copeland said trying to limit abortion was "reckless" as it could push women to travel elsewhere for services at a time when travel is being discouraged.

## 'We're preparing for the worst,' say food banks

A FOOD bank founder in west London said the coronavirus crisis might overwhelm her service.

Hammersmith and Fulham Foodbank gave out 120,000 meals to feed 12,000 people from its three branches last year.

But founder Daphne Aikens said the crisis meant "we won't be able to bulk buy from supermarkets".

"We purchase about 5 percent of our stock each year," she said.

"We have heard other food banks are struggling to order more than a few items."

"If more people become unemployed, we could see an increase



Empty supermarket shelves

in people needing food banks. We're preparing for the worst."

There are just over 2,000 food banks across Britain. The Trussell Trust charity distributed 23 percent more food parcels in April to September 2019, compared to the same period in 2018.

## Lloyd Webber is no friend of ours

ONE TWITTER user had the right response to Tory Andrew Lloyd Webber's attempt to self-publicise during the coronavirus crisis.

The former Tory peer had tweeted that he would play some songs from his musicals to entertain people stuck at home, and asked for suggestions.

One user replied, "Sing the one about when you flew in from New York in 2015, solely to vote in favour of deep cuts to Tax Credits for the working poor—in the House of Lords—despite having voted only twice in the previous 13 years and being worth £650 million."

Britannia boss Alex Langsam

## Sacking was just an 'admin error'

CRAP EXCUSE of the week award goes to Britannia Hotels.

The business has blamed an "administrative error" after it sacked staff at one of its Scotland properties and left some without accommodation.

A letter to workers at the Coylumbridge Hotel in Aviemore—owned by Britannia Hotels—terminated employment and told affected staff to leave their accommodation immediately.

In response, Britannia's spokeswoman said, "Unfortunately, the communication sent to these employees was an administrative error."

The spokeswoman could not say if the workers would be returned to their former positions, or if sackings would take place at other Britannia properties.

Britannia Hotels has been chosen as the worst hotel chain in Britain repeatedly by Which?

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# Tories' measures are not enough to beat back virus

by SADIE ROBINSON

**BORIS JOHNSON** announced lockdown conditions for Britain in a televised address on Monday of this week.

He said that people should stay in their homes and only leave for "very limited purposes".

These are to buy essentials, to get medicines, support a vulnerable person or to exercise once a day.

Shops deemed "non-essential" will be closed.

And public gatherings of more than two people will be banned—with cops having new powers to enforce this.

In measures that were set to be passed on Thursday, police will be able to fine people deemed to be breaking the rules and to disperse gatherings.

Johnson's announcement was another serious escalation of the government response to coronavirus.

It followed days of the mainstream media issuing denunciations of ordinary people's lack of social distancing.

Social distancing is crucial to slow the spread of the disease. But Johnson's plans aren't enough to keep people safe and supported—and they hold real dangers.

## Defiant

Several bosses initially responded to Johnson's announcement with defiant messages promising to stay open.

For many people, their safety depends largely on the whims of their employers (see right).

And is it surprising that workers still feel pressured to work when many fear losing pay or their jobs otherwise?

Ordinary people in London were attacked for getting onto crowded Tube trains on Monday and Tuesday. But nobody chooses to travel on a



PEOPLE ARE following social distancing advice—but many are still forced to work

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

packed train. The real problem is that services were cut back—meaning key workers and others pressured to work suffered crammed trains.

How are poor people supposed to follow social distancing advice when it could mean them running out of food to feed their children?

How can others "stay at home" when they have no home?

The Tories are appealing to us to follow the advice better, as though we are too stupid to understand how serious the crisis is.

But if they really wanted to tackle coronavirus, they could bring in

several measures immediately that would make a real difference. They could implement mass testing for coronavirus, make sure the NHS has all the funds and equipment it need, and suspend rents and mortgages for ordinary people.

They could halt energy and council tax bills.

They could take postal workers up on their offer of becoming an essential service and announce weekly deliveries of essentials to every household.

They could guarantee every worker's full wages—including zero hours,

temporary and self-employed workers—so that no one felt they had to keep on going to work.

All of those things would make it much easier for people to stay at home and stay safer.

Instead the Tories are focusing on punishing ordinary people and scapegoating them for a crisis they have helped to create. What we really need is a political solution.

**What's your story?**  
Email with your ideas  
reports@socialistworker.co.uk

## Cop powers won't help

POLICE ALREADY do not use their powers against everyone equally. They target working class, poor, vulnerable and black and Asian people.

In France, similar laws to those Johnson announced this week saw the cops mainly target migrants and homeless people for fines.

Homeless charities said they had had reports of cases in Paris, Lyon, Lille, Bordeaux, Toulouse and Bayonne.

Maud Bigot from a Lyon charity said, "People are terrified, because the police have told them they will be fined if they don't find

shelter." Governments often bring in "temporary" repressive measures that remain once the emergency is over.

Johnson's announcement quickly led to some calling for even more powers and resources for the cops.

Sir Peter Fahy, former chief constable of Greater Manchester Police, said, "If you compare us to Italy, we have about half the number of police officers."

"We don't have a paramilitary police force like the Carabinieri."

We do not need a paramilitary police force. We need more resources for the NHS and more measures to support ordinary people.



Peter Fahy

## Reckless bosses put lives at risk

**BOSSES ARE** putting workers at risk as firms try to keep operating during the coronavirus crisis.

Bill works for Majestic Wine in London, which told staff on Monday it would keep sending deliveries to customers.

"They've said we are 'going dark' and not having customers in the shops," Bill told Socialist Worker.

"But we're still using the same phones and travelling in. Someone has been off really ill with symptoms at my shop."

"It's not safe. Someone will die and it will be as a



result of this decision to keep stores open."

Steve is another Majestic worker. "There's a lot of anger among staff," he told Socialist Worker.

"They've said they don't qualify for the government deal to pay 80 percent of wages. So there's always this threat that our wages are going away."

"They're telling us if we don't feel safe we don't have to come to work, but can take voluntary unpaid leave."

"People can't afford to do that. What about colleagues with children?"

In East Kilbride, Sarah described her fears for her partner who is being pushed to continue working for a small manufacturing and engineering firm.

"The boss told them, 'This place is staying open as normal—nobody's shutting us down,'" Sarah told Socialist Worker. "If he doesn't go in, he won't get paid."

"They have one machine making medicine cups for the NHS, so they say it's essential to stay open. But the boss has got them doing all the other work."

"My partner has worked there for 22 years. They are all too frightened to say anything."

All names have been changed



# Uncertainty for people at work in ‘ghost town’

As people are encouraged to work from home, **Sadie Robinson** looks at what that means for those who can’t

**PARTS OF Britain** look increasingly like a ghost town after the government advised workers to work from home where possible.

But for some, staying indoors isn’t an option.

“In our job, we can’t work from home,” London bus driver Des told Socialist Worker. But he said many workers are fearful for their health.

“Before the virus, we weren’t that cautious about taking over from another driver,” he said. “But now a lot of drivers are wiping their steering wheels and washing their hands more.”

James, another driver, said he was “definitely worried” about coming into contact with so many people every day. “Our families are worried too,” he told Socialist Worker. “My wife gave me wipes to bring to work.”

Drivers said bosses have provided hand sanitiser, but some felt they could do more to protect workers. “They just tell us to wash our hands more,” said Lee.

“They don’t give us masks—they don’t have the time to worry about us.”

In a nearby Morrisons, extra staff have been drafted in to deal with increased demand.

Mike, on the self-service tills, was supposed to be on holiday last week but had been “called in because it’s so hectic”.

But he said bosses aren’t keeping workers safe.

## Gloves

“They don’t give us anything,” Mike told Socialist Worker. “They don’t even offer us hand gel or gloves.”

“All the hand sanitiser we have is brought in by staff themselves.”

“We have asked for these things but they just turn a deaf ear. They don’t want to know.”

On London Underground services continue to ensure key workers can get to work.

But one RMT union member at a central London station reported dangerous conditions there.

They said contractors are still

## BACK STORY

**Many workers can’t stay at home during the coronavirus crisis**

● They include people who work in the NHS, public transport and supermarkets

● Closures mean other workers face an uncertain future

● Workers fear for their health and safety, and say bosses aren’t doing enough to protect them

● Some supermarket workers have said they have to bring their own hand sanitiser into work

carrying out routine maintenance in poorly ventilated rooms, with not enough space for social distancing.

And a children and family social worker in East Renfrewshire told Socialist Worker that bosses aren’t taking necessary safety measures.

He said bosses tried to pack hundreds of key workers into a meeting on Monday—but backed off after pressure from workers.

The Unison union member said bosses planned to group workers together in “hubs” in schools to help support vulnerable students.

“People are pretty unhappy about it,” he told Socialist Worker.

“What advantage is it going to bring? It’s not just about people with underlying health conditions. It’s about spreading coronavirus.”

Elsewhere people are worried about how they will get by if more shops and cafes close. Martin, who runs a Portuguese cafe in south London, said the situation is “very scary”.

“We don’t know what will happen tomorrow,” he told Socialist Worker.

“But this is where I get money from to pay for everything.”

“My business landlord won’t tolerate me not paying rent.”

All names have been changed



**On other pages...**

No care for the ill or infirm  
>>Page 20



THE BUSY old days are gone in Vauxhall, south London

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

# ‘Just in time’ production for profit to blame for empty supermarket shelves

by SARAH BATES

THE TORIES are trying to deflect blame for food shortages at supermarkets onto ordinary people.

Environment secretary George Eustice used the government’s daily press briefing last Saturday to tell people to “calm down” and “only buy what they need”.

“Be responsible when you shop and think of others,” he said.

“Buying more than you need means others may be left without.”

Stephen Powis, NHS England’s national medical director, declared that “we should all be ashamed” of reports that health workers can’t access supplies.

It is a cynical attempt to divert blame from the top of society onto the vast majority of people who are attempting to follow government advice.

The British Retail Consortium said that people had bought an extra £1 billion worth of food in the last three weeks. The figure has been used as an example of shameful hoarding and dangerous levels of stockpiling.

But it equates to around £15 extra per person.

It’s understandable that

people are buying more food and supplies. They are preparing for an unknown period of social distancing or isolation, with stricter lockdown measures potentially further down the line.

Most children won’t be able to eat school meals and workers can’t pop out to buy lunch from a cafe.

And, because people are being

encouraged to go outside as little as possible, they will buy more in one go rather than across the week.

A few people hoarding hundreds of toilet rolls isn’t causing empty shelves. The problem lies with “just in time” methods of production and distribution under capitalism.

To save on storage costs, supermarkets only fill their shops with what they immediately expect to sell. Even a relatively small increase in demand means that they can’t get stock out from warehouses or factories to shelves quickly enough.

There are measures that the government could take if it wanted to guarantee supplies for NHS workers and other frontline staff.

It could, for instance, organise home deliveries through postal workers acting in an emergency role.

These would go much further than the plans outlined last weekend (see page 20).

But instead it has passed the buck on to ordinary people to distract from its own failings.



George Eustice

## CORONAVIRUS ROUND-UP

# How Tony Blair helped to trash our capacity to test

WHY HAS Britain tested so few people for coronavirus?

The answer may lie in the breakup of hospital pathology departments under plans developed by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown’s Labour governments.

They brought in private healthcare boss Lord Carter of Coles to improve the “cost effectiveness” of hospital labs across Britain—and reform the workforce.

In his 2008 report Carter recommended ending the practice of major hospitals having laboratories of such a size that they could conduct most tests themselves. He saw this as wasteful and inefficient.

Instead a new “hub and spoke” system was brought in. Hubs would serve groups of hospitals, while local labs were scaled down.

Carter claimed this would result in huge savings. The bosses of the “NHS



We need more testing

Improvement” body were thrilled, and demanded quick implementation.

As the changes came in private health providers started muscling in—with predictable results.

Staff numbers were slashed and quality suffered.

Now the system can’t cope with the daily demand for coronavirus tests.

Even health workers regularly exposed to patients infected with Covid-19 cannot get tested. They face the agonising choice of self-isolating if they get symptoms

or continuing to treat patients while knowing they could be making their condition worse. The head of the World Health Organisation last week said, “Test, test, test,” was the number one priority to fight the spread of the virus.

In the Italian town of Vo, the location of the country’s first coronavirus death, testing and resetting of all 3,300 inhabitants has halted new infections in it.

Unfortunately in Britain the mantra our leaders have lived by is, “Profit, profit, profit.”

# Zero hour contract workers face layoffs and uncertainty

WORKERS ON zero hours and precarious contracts face even more uncertainty as bosses react to the outbreak by cutting hours.

Eleanor is a masters student in London who relied on a zero hours contract job in hospitality, but was told her work was cutting shifts.

With no income, she’s had to leave London to stay with her mum in Nottingham. Now she’s waiting in limbo to find out whether she’ll be made redundant, and whether her landlord will let her miss her rent.

“I assume I’m going to get involuntary redundancy as I’m on zero hours,” she told Socialist Worker.

“My main concern is I don’t have money for rent. My



Deliveroo drivers protest

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

housemate is trying to sort out something with my landlord but we haven’t heard from him yet. If I was back in London my main concern would be food.

“I’m not the only one in this position. So many of my friends have lost their jobs.”

Eleanor added that as a student she didn’t know if there are any benefits she’s entitled to.

But more frustrating was the advice and

moralism by rich people in the media who won’t lose out as society shuts down.

“We’re being told on Twitter and Instagram by millionaires and influencers to stay at home—but we don’t have a choice,” she said.

“My sister in law works at Virgin and is facing eight months leave. But Richard Branson owns a private island and isn’t offering up any of his own money.”

## Socialist Worker WHAT WE THINK

# LABOUR AND UNION CHIEFS FAIL CORONAVIRUS TEST

THE CRISIS caused by coronavirus is testing every political force in society—and exposing some basic truths. One remarkable feature is how often the Labour Party agrees with the right wing Tory government.

Not two weeks ago it would have been almost unthinkable that Jeremy Corbyn would agree to anything Boris Johnson did.

Yet when this week Johnson announced sweeping repressive measures to force people into social distancing, Corbyn rushed to agree with him.

“This is the right response,” he said, adding it was “one we have been calling for”.

Corbyn added some mild demands, such as “clear guidance” on which workplaces should close. But fundamentally he agreed that this is the solution to the coronavirus crisis.

It followed a weekend in which the right and the media shifted blame for the crisis away from those at the top towards ordinary people.

“Commuters” were the problem on crowded trains, not bosses demanding people come into work. “Greedy shoppers”

were responsible for food shortages, not a system that produces plenty but won’t ensure everyone can get what they need.

London Labour mayor Sadiq Khan led the way in demanding the measures that Johnson brought in. Trade union leaders were no better.

Dave Prentis of Unison blamed “selfish” public transport users—echoing the words of Tory health secretary Matt Hancock.

The TSSA transport union demanded cops at all main London stations to check people’s reasons for travelling.

Meanwhile Frances O’Grady—general secretary of the TUC—described support

for Johnson as “solidarity”. The argument is that the crisis is so deep that everyone has a common interest in resolving it.

But for every government across the world, ending the crisis means rescuing the system so that bosses can get back to making profits.

Labour and the unions might differ on how that system should work. But they believe it has to be rescued—so they end up agreeing with the Tory measures.

Our vision is different. We want to end the system that puts profit before people’s lives and safety and allowed coronavirus to spread.

Urgent alternative measures would be to close the businesses that force people into work—with pay guarantees.

Take over essential services from private bosses to make sure people get what they need.

And distribute food to all to avoid overcrowding in shops and stockpiling.

Those measures point towards a fundamental challenge to how society operates. Winning them requires a political force that wants to end the system and replace it with a new one—not rescue it.

“The right and the media shifted blame from those at the top onto ordinary people

# AN IMPERIAL DISASTER

IF CORONAVIRUS rips through countries ravaged by imperialism, it would spell catastrophe for millions.

In the Global South, countries were underdeveloped by slavery, colonialism and imperialism.

And in recent decades free market shock therapy—pushed by the US, Britain and the International Monetary Fund—has kept people in dire conditions.

How is social distancing possible in Kibera in Kenya? Some 250,000 live on the outskirts of Nairobi

in the largest slum in Africa. An average shack in Kibera is 12 foot by 12 foot and often houses eight people. Those who aren’t unemployed survive on less than a dollar a day.

And how can people wash their hands when they rely on two water pipes for the whole area?

Some rulers in the Global South will try to grab more power for themselves and offer no solutions.

African health services have valuable experience of dealing with viruses, but underfunding and

privatisation leave them exposed. South African hospitals have fewer than 1,000 intensive care unit (ICU) beds—for a population of 56 million.

Poverty means around four million people living with HIV/AIDS can’t get medication to help their weakened immunity.

In Zimbabwe, the capital Harare’s infectious diseases hospital has zero ICU beds.

If the catastrophe comes, we should all point the finger at imperialism and neoliberalism.

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## ANALYSIS

ALEX CALLINICOS



# Crisis is a big blow to neoliberalism

**IF YOU** want a sense of how bad the crisis is, just look at Boris Johnson's face. More and more he resembles a bruised and battered rabbit stuck in headlights.

But we were really the rabbits in a huge and deadly experiment under Johnson's and his advisor Dominic Cummings's "herd immunity" strategy.

An article on the website Buzzfeed on how they were forced into changing tack says, "Johnson's own personal views on the role of the state have been a major factor."

In other words, neoliberalism helped to motivate the original decision to avoid a lockdown.

Political fear of the potential death toll helped to force Johnson into a partial U-turn. But it was also the scale of the economic collapse.

Investment bank Morgan Stanley predicted the US's gross domestic product—which measures the market value of all goods and services—will fall by 30 percent between April and June. Other financial institutions also predict drastic falls.

"Whatever actually happens it is crucial that key actors in global economy are expecting an unprecedented implosion," tweeted economic historian Adam Tooze. "That changes the game!"

These figures are for the United States, but the picture is the same for Britain and the rest of Europe. This is an economic collapse on the scale of the Great Depression.

As the Marxist blogger Michael Roberts was quick to point out, this huge contraction reflects how fragile the world economy already was.

It had been kept afloat for the past decade by cheap central bank money. This has led to a huge rise in corporate borrowing. Fear of a debt crisis has now caused a credit crunch comparable to the 2007-8 crash.

Banks and firms have stopped lending to each other, and are hanging onto their cash. Dollars—the fuel of the global banking system—have become scarce, just as they did during the crash.

The price of all kinds of assets have been falling as investors desperately sell to get their hands on dollars. This is a classic feature of financial panics, as the revolutionary Karl Marx described in his master work Capital.

## Contraction

But the contraction is exacerbated by the reality that combating the pandemic requires a lockdown that will close much of the economy.

The problem is that in capitalist economies, the production of goods and services generates economic actors' income in the shape of wages, profits and rent.

Dealing with this problem requires more than the kind of measures that central banks are now rushing out. These are rock bottom interest rates, dollar swap lines from the US Federal Reserve Board for other central banks and buying assets such as bonds.

All this is out of the 2008-9 playbook. But what we need now is state management of the economy.

This is required to impose lockdown and to decide which sectors should shut or stay open or be redeployed.

It's also needed to transfer resources to health services, to replace the incomes of all those whose jobs have been suspended, and to protect the vulnerable.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has been pushed gradually in this direction. In ten days he introduced three packages—the first £12 billion, the second another £20 billion.

His announcement last Friday that he will pay 80 percent of "furloughed" workers' wages will cost £3.5 billion per million workers over three months.

Similar measures are being introduced elsewhere. They will be paid for either by higher government borrowing or through what economists call "direct monetary financing"—printing money.

This is anathema to neoliberal orthodoxy—hence Johnson's reluctance to go in this direction, and characteristic foot-dragging by the European Union.

And there is indeed a contradiction, summed up by the right wing economist Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in the Telegraph newspaper, "Boris must embrace socialism immediately to save the liberal free market."

But once we have started to put need before profit, why should we stop when the pandemic is over?

WORKPLACES SUCH as Primark have closed their doors

# Tory wages plan subsidises the bosses—not workers

**TORY** chancellor Rishi Sunak announced a scheme to subsidise wages that was hailed as a total transformation in policy last week.

But the details showed that it's far less generous than it might have seemed.

Sunak said the state would pay companies to stop them sacking workers at 80 percent of each employee's salary up to £2,500 a month.

He said the plan was an "unprecedented, economic intervention" by the state. It came only days after a £350 billion bailout for bosses.

The scheme is a departure from Tory free market orthodoxy—and shows a forest of "magic money trees" can quickly be found to save capitalism.

But there are major problems.

The money goes to bosses, not directly to workers. They fill out a form that describes their workers as "furloughed"—temporarily sacked. The state will hand over 80 percent of their wages. There is no instruction for bosses to pay the other 20 percent.

There also remains a gap in the coverage of statutory sick pay for two million self-employed people with low earnings. If workers don't have the wages or benefits that they and their families need they will continue to

work even if they are ill or need to self-isolate.

People on zero hours contracts, precarious workers and freelancers may not be covered. In sectors that are more casualised bosses may just lay off workers without bothering to apply for the scheme.

The IWGB union said, "The 80 percent wage subsidies offered by the government to businesses to keep people employed discriminates against 'gig-economy' and other self-employed workers, who are not included."

## Self-employed let down

**RISHI SUNAK'S** scheme also doesn't reach most of the 15 percent of the workforce who are self-employed.

This is a mixed group which has grown as people have found it harder to get stable employment with proper contracts.

Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies showed that about a third had taxable income of less than £10,000 a year. A small number of high-earning partners in professional firms rank among Britain's top 1 percent by income.

Rishi Sunak

O'Grady backs Tory plan

Sunak's statement mentioned helping renters. But this was centred on raising benefits, not suspending rents.

The government has not yet demanded stakes in firms or wholesale state ownership in exchange for the cash. They are handing over a sum equivalent to hundreds of billions for nothing in return.

On Monday the government suspended the rail franchise system in a move that effectively nationalises any losses by railway companies for the next six months.

But after that the privatisers might just get them back. And during this period they get a guaranteed "management fee"—profit.

TUC union federation general secretary Frances O'Grady said the plan was a "breakthrough" and that Sunak had shown "real leadership".

"We're glad he's listened to unions and taken vital steps to support working families," she said. Unite union leader Len McCluskey praised it as "bold and very much necessary".

Union leaders are wrong to back a Tory chancellor who delivered only limited assistance—through bosses—and will savage workers once the emergency lifts.

We need to keep up that fight to demand workers aren't made to suffer at the hands of this crisis.

# Windrush report shows up cruel racism of Tories

by TOMÁŠ TENGEY-EVANS

**THE TORIES' treatment of the Windrush generation of migrants was "consistent with some elements" of institutional racism, according to an official report.**

The long-delayed Windrush Lessons Learned review published last week said the 2018 scandal was "foreseeable and avoidable".

The report found that Home Office "failings demonstrate an institutional ignorance and thoughtlessness towards the issue of race".

It said it was "unable to make a definitive finding of institutional racism". Yet the report said the failings are "consistent with some elements of the definition of institutional racism".

Tens of thousands of people who had come from Britain's former colonies between 1945 and 1973—and their descendants—faced deportation or loss of livelihood. The "hostile environment" meant people who had lived in Britain for decades found they didn't have the required documentation.

The report is damning of policies pushed by Theresa May. She was the home secretary who orchestrated the law, then prime minister when the scandal broke.

Across Whitehall departments, officials "felt the principle of the government's hostile environment policy was not up for question". Instead they felt "that they were there to come up with solutions to make it happen".

The hostile environment was the trigger for the Windrush scandal. But it has deeper roots in racist immigration laws pushed through by both Tory and Labour governments.

## Legislation

The report said, "The causes of the Windrush scandal can be traced back through successive rounds of policy and legislation about immigration and nationality from the 1960s onwards."

For instance, the Immigration Act 1971 said people from the Windrush generation could live in Britain. Yet they were "not given any documents" and "nor were records kept".

The report's author, Wendy Williams, said "ministers on behalf of the department should admit that serious harm was inflicted on people who are British and provide an unqualified apology".

Tory home secretary Priti Patel apologised in the House of Commons when the report was published.

But Patel is pushing through a more brutal, "points-based" immigration system and has restarted deportation "charter flights" to Jamaica.

The Tories justify the flights by



ON THE march against Tory racism

PICTURES: GUY SMALLMAN

claiming that those on board are "serious criminals". They want to push through a divide and rule strategy that falsely paints some people as "good migrants" and others as "bad migrants".

A previous leaked copy of the report said the government should consider stopping the deportation of offenders who had come to Britain as children in all but the "most severe cases".

This was not in the final report. Its omission is symptomatic of how the report doesn't go far enough to demand dismantling the racist immigration system that produced the scandal.

Anti-racists have to find ways to keep up the fight to stop all deportations, shut down detention centres and defend people's right to stay.



## On other pages...

New laws give dangerous powers to the state >>> Page 17

## Horror for refugees

IN GREECE overcrowded refugee camps on islands in the Aegean sea have been put on lockdown.

Tens of thousands of refugees trapped on the islands are being asked to stay inside.

Whole families are told to stay inside tents or tiny corners inside converted shipping containers.

One child was killed in a fire in a container in the Moria camp on the island of Lesbos on Monday of last week.

In Moria there are now only five doctors and seven nurses for more than 20,000 residents.

Sanitation is a major worry. The Greek government said cleaning services would be bolstered inside the camps.

But a source inside Moria told Socialist Worker that rubbish is piling up and human waste spilling out onto the paths.

There is just one water tap for every 1,300 people in some parts of the camp.

Socialist Worker has seen footage of refugees desperately scrambling for bottled water distributed at the camp's gates.

Medical charity Doctors Without Borders called on the Greek government to evacuate



Burnt out camp in Lesbos

the camps and give refugees safety on the mainland.

The charity's medical coordinator in Greece, Hilde Vochten, said, "Recommended measures such as frequent hand washing and social distancing are just impossible."

Elsewhere in northern France, aid workers say refugees feel "scared, ignored and abandoned" in the face of the growing coronavirus crisis.

Around 800 refugees are trapped in squalid conditions at Britain's border in Calais and northern France.

One British aid volunteer told Socialist Worker, "There is a huge health risk."

"People don't eat properly, their immune systems are shot to ribbons, they live in damp conditions and many have respiratory problems."

Kiarash, an Iranian refugee, told Socialist Worker, "It is really important that there are support agencies still coming in."

"It would be a disaster for refugees if the aid was withdrawn."

## Campaign frees detainees

**PRESSURE FROM detainee rights' organisations has forced the Tory government to release 300 people from immigration detention centres.**

The move comes after detainee groups launched a legal challenge and open letter calling for people's release. They warned that not releasing people amid the coronavirus outbreak could have "catastrophic consequences".

Bella Sankey is director of Detention Action, one of the groups taking on the Home Office.

She said, "Our landmark legal challenge has already forced a response from the home secretary. We are

delighted the high court has now ordered a hearing for next week and we'll be pressing for a robust review of all detentions."

**HUNDREDS of people tuned into an online rally organised by Stand Up To Racism (SUTR) last Saturday.**

SUTR had cancelled national demonstrations in London and Glasgow because of the coronavirus crisis.

Speakers at the online rally included writer and academic Gary Younge, Labour MP Claudia Webbe and TUC union federation equalities officer Wilf Sullivan.



# Donald Trump's corona crisis measures are handout for rich

Trillions of dollars for a coronavirus aid package in the United States is mainly about protecting profits, writes Gabby Thorpe

**DONALD TRUMP'S government is attempting to push through a trillion dollar "stimulus package" to tackle the coronavirus crisis.**

But it faced some resistance from the Democrat-controlled senate which blocked progress early this week.

However, both Republicans and Democrats agree that big business needs a handout in order to keep the system afloat—and it needs to be bigger than the bailout that followed the 2008 financial crash.

The proposed package came as US cases of Covid-19 passed 40,000.

Trump's proposals include "direct payments" to those below a certain income level, amounting to £2,500 for a family of four.

The payments would be made on 6 April, meaning desperate people who have lost their jobs will be waiting for two weeks for help.

Meanwhile, Trump has been able to use the crisis to try and push through policies that he had previously been forced to put on the backburner.

The New York Times reported that the White House is "quietly advancing policies that president Trump has long advocated, from tougher border controls to an assault on organised labour."

"Administration officials insist that such policies are necessary to stem the outbreak. But opportunism is clearly in play."

The president of the American

Federation of Government Employees said new rules about union membership will make it "harder for rank and file employees to speak up."

But workers' resistance is growing.

Wildcat strikes by autoworkers have successfully closed all factories owned by General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler.

The wave of action began on the night shift at the Fiat-Chrysler Sterling Heights assembly plant in Michigan last week. Workers downed tools and were sent home by management.

The morning shift followed suit, sitting down and allowing products to roll past on the assembly line without touching them.

## Wildcat

Within hours, production at Jefferson assembly, Toledo assembly and the Dundee engine plant were paralysed by wildcat walkouts.

Auto bosses took few steps to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Official advice was displayed, but notices telling workers to stay home if they were sick were redacted.

The factories will remain closed until "at least" 30 March. They should remain closed until the crisis is over. France

The hope is that US workers continue to fight for their rights. Government bills that aim to bail out bosses and attack workers and migrants should be resisted.

## Palestine

THE FIRST two cases of coronavirus were detected in the Gaza Strip on Sunday of last week.

Two people have been put in quarantine.

Siege conditions enforced by Israel may have slowed the virus's spread to the Palestinian territory.

But they also mean an outbreak there—where some 2 million people are trapped—could be devastating.

In the West Bank, where there are some 57 confirmed cases, the Palestinian Authority has imposed a lockdown.

But this doesn't apply to the 800,000 Israeli settlers living there, who can travel freely to and from Israel where there are some 1,238 confirmed cases.

## South America

AT LEAST 23 people were killed after prisoners in Colombia rioted over unsanitary conditions and the threat of a coronavirus outbreak.

Inmates at prisons across the country protested against overcrowding and poor health services.

Anxious relatives outside the La Modelo prison said they heard gunshots after security services arrived.

Some 83 inmates there were reported injured. ●PEOPLE IN Brazil have protested over far right president Jair Bolsonaro's response to the coronavirus crisis.

People lean out of their windows every night to bang pots and pans.

MEMBERS OF the United Auto Workers' union have shutdown many car plants across the US

## FRANCE

# Bosses are rocked by the 'brutal change of attitude' among workers

A SERIES of strikes in French factories engaged in non-essential production has forced employers to close some of them down, at least temporarily.

The revolt against being herded into unsafe workplaces has worried big business. Patrick Martin, head of the Medef bosses' organisation, said, "There has been an extremely brutal change in the attitude of employees in all sectors of activity".

One walkout that was particularly welcome came at the Dassault Aviation factory in Argenteuil. This makes fighter jets for the military.

Anthony De Castro, the CGT union representative at the factory, said, "No masks were provided to employees, nor gel. Six to seven employees were sick last Monday and the following day this figure rose to 13.

"Management says they sent them home and that these were not Covid-19 cases, but none were screened."

The CGT demanded that the factory be closed for at least 15 days, which bosses refused. So around 300 workers went on immediate strike. Faced with this resistance, bosses shut the factory.

## Export

The CGT added that "manufacturing business and military aircraft for export are not one of the sectors essential to the life of the country."

"For the CGT, the life and health of employees and their families are priceless and must take precedence over all financial considerations."

Meanwhile the government of president Emmanuel Macron has forced through a repressive set of laws supposedly to deal with the

coronavirus crisis. The mainstream right and the fascist RN party backed them and only the France Insoumise party of Jean-Luc Melenchon voted against.

The measures will enable companies to break some restrictions on working hours and limit holidays. People who are deemed to be outside their homes without sufficient reason will be fined £125 for the first offence.

If there is a recurrence then the fine rises to nearly £1,400. Repeated violations can lead to six months in prison.

The homeless and black people are being hit hard by the new laws.

Ten percent of the fines across the whole country have been levied in the Seine Saint-Denis district which has 2.5 percent of the French population. It is the district with the highest proportion of migrants.

## Justice denied

THE UTTERANCES from Boris Johnson's daily press conferences with a nodding dog either side of him are a cynical move.

The Tory government has compounded this opportunism by choosing the height of the Covid-19 crisis to deny justice to the families of those killed during the conflict in Northern Ireland.

There are nearly 2,000 unsolved cases.

Northern Ireland minister Brandon Lewis' legislation proposes that only those cases where there was new and compelling evidence and a "realistic" prospect of prosecution would proceed with a full investigation.

This will close the vast majority of those cases and prevent them from ever being re-opened.

As human rights NGO Relatives for Justice said, "The statement is disingenuous and insulting to families who have been denied justice since the killings of their loved ones.

"Rather than meet its legal obligations, the British government has once again moved the goal posts to protect those within its armed forces and those within illegal organisations they colluded with.

"Its ultimate aim is to prevent the truth from emerging about its role in the conflict."

And what a dirty, murderous role the state played—Bloody Sunday, the Ballymurphy massacre and the British state's collusion with loyalist paramilitaries, to name just a few examples.

**Pat Carmody**  
Oxford

## The scandal of cruel 'avoidable' Tory racism

THE long-awaited independent report into the Windrush scandal has finally appeared.

Wendy Williams, the author of the 275-page report, insists the Windrush scandal was "foreseeable and avoidable" and that those targeted by it were the victims of "systematic operational failing" by the Home Office.

The fact is the Windrush scandal was the direct result of years of racist Tory anti-immigrant

policies. The government department has launched a number of anti-immigration initiatives.

Priti Patel responded to the Windrush report by saying, "On behalf of this and successive governments I am truly sorry."

But her apology is worthless given the Tories remain committed to building their racist "hostile environment".

**Sasha Simic**  
East London

# We need to fight to bail out people, not rich businesses

I'VE HELPED to set up a mutual aid group in Mile End, east London. We've distributed leaflets telling people how to access help at food banks, mosques, churches and charities.

Soon we had too many people for one WhatsApp chat and split into five local area groups.

People are posting about their neighbours who need some shopping delivered, or their prescriptions picked up.

One of the demands that our group should be putting forward is that Tower Hamlets council call off the threat of mass sackings for its workforce.

And people in the group have raised that we should put demands

on central government to give the council more funding.

As people start to lose their jobs, things are going to become more difficult, depending on how long this goes on for.

People won't be able to pay for their own shopping, let alone someone else's.

We need to argue that the government bail people out instead of bailing out Richard Branson.

You can see the temptation to set up Crowdfunding appeals, but we need to put political pressure for state payments to be made to people.

**Bethan Turner**  
East London

HOWEVER THE pandemic pans out over the next year, the bosses' class will already be planning how they can benefit while we bear the brunt.

Business bankruptcies will follow food shortages and won't be helped by vague statements of undeliverable financial support from politicians.

But there are many, many more of us than them. We can refuse to pay, yet again, for their crisis.

We need to link the pressing political issues of climate action, anti-austerity, anti-racism and trade union militancy to form a generalised united front.

**Dermot Smyth**  
Sheffield

## Organise against Scottish budget cuts

ANGELA FEENEY, a leading councillor from the Scottish Labour Party, has quit the party after refusing to vote for a budget of cuts.

The budget, which was proposed by Labour-run North Lanarkshire council, meant cuts and increased charges for essential services for some of the most vulnerable people.

Feeney said, "I could not vote for any budget that will see £31 million of cuts being taken from our communities. It is time we offered real resistance and say enough is enough."

Feeney has an



Angela Feeney

outstanding record as a principled socialist.

She was active in organising support for asylum seekers in Calais, and she also worked closely with Unite Against Fascism

in 2018 in building a huge demonstration against the Nazi Scottish Defence League.

We cannot rely on either Labour or SNP-led councils to resist Westminster imposed cuts that are then being passed on to local councils by the Scottish National Party government.

Only our collective action as workers and service users, of the sort which led to the fantastic victory of the Glasgow equal pay strikers in 2019, can do that.

**Iain Ferguson**  
Glasgow

Just a thought...

## Covid-19 reactions

THERESA MAY said there was "no magic money tree".

There isn't for children and families, obviously.

However airline companies which have their—sorry, our—stolen loot invested will be rescued no doubt.

**Frank Mulholland**  
On Facebook

ALL these dyed-in-the-wool neoliberals are now implementing massive state intervention because the profit-driven capitalist system cannot tackle the coronavirus crisis.

But unless people start to fight for collective democratic control of the economy all we'll get is a shift from private capitalism towards state capitalism.

The examples that Socialist Worker has been reporting of workers taking action themselves are so important.

**Phil Webster**  
Lancashire

WE NEED a general strike in response to coronavirus.

**Zoltan Csete**  
On Facebook

## Moria horror is shocking

I WAS shocked to read about the conditions in the Moria refugee camp on Lesbos (Socialist Worker, 18 March).

Do you think the politicians understand what lengths people have to go to just to find safety?

It's often their wars that push people to flee in the first place.

Let all the refugees in now!

**Janet Evans**  
East London

## Blame rich over climate

IT'S QUITE cheering to see the blame for dramatic climate change laid where it belongs—at the door of the rich.

A study from Leeds university found that the wealthiest 10 percent of people consume around 20 times more than the bottom 10 percent.

It's a good example of how the inequalities of capitalism are helping to produce climate chaos.

**Alex Wade**  
Lancashire

**‘The trust has big incident meetings and then emails staff, but porters, cleaners and domestics don’t get them because we’re outsourced’**

**ISOBEL**

HOSPITAL DOMESTIC,  
DERBYSHIRE

DOMESTICS, CLEANERS and porters are the forgotten staff. We’re like mushrooms—kept in the dark, fed on shit.

Some staff aren’t told that they have confirmed coronavirus cases on their wards. The cases are being kept on different wards. One patient is on a ward where people have lower immunity. Another one came in and was only confirmed five days later.

Doctors and nurses are having mask-fit tests, where aerosol is sprayed onto the mask and if you can taste it the mask doesn’t work for you. None of our staff have been offered it.

There are no distinct rules. It feels like the left hand doesn’t know what the right one is doing. Of course things change—that’s the nature of the beast—but you’d think there would be a contingency plan.

The trust has big incident meetings and then emails staff, but porters, cleaners and domestics don’t get them because we’re outsourced.

They should be looking after our health and they aren’t doing that very well. One worker was told to reuse the same mask. I’m telling staff, ‘If we run out of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) clothing, don’t go into the ward.’

There is a lot more pressure on us—staff are having to self-isolate and we are running out of supplies. Things like paper towels and masks are going from the hospital warehouse.

We have to clean in a different way because of coronavirus and we don’t have enough staff to cope.

There’s no time to get other stuff done. They put out an advert to hire more people, but that will take training and time.

**‘Someone I work with came back from maternity leave recently. But their baby developed a temperature so they had to self-isolate’**

**BEN**

NURSE IN GP SURGERY,  
EAST LONDON

WE’VE BEEN testing patients for temperatures in the reception area before they get into the consultation. If they’ve got one, we tell them to self-isolate to protect other patients.

There are different ways of testing temperature. One does not involve touching anyone, where you point a thermometer at someone’s forehead.

The other is where you put the thermometer into a person’s ear.

There aren’t enough of the best ones so we have to touch people. We may be at risk of getting coronavirus—but aren’t tested.

Someone I work with came back from maternity leave recently. But their baby developed a temperature—which babies can tend to get—so they

The lack of protective clothing for health workers is a major cause of stress and anger (below)



had to go home and self-isolate.

Because of the NHS crisis and staff shortages, people either don’t want to go into the service or only last a couple of years. It means nurses in general practice are getting on a bit and are in the more vulnerable group themselves.

There isn’t just a winter crisis, it’s a year-round crisis—there is no real respite in the NHS. And since Covid-19 there has been a real frustration.

**‘Nurses are not angels—people are anxious. One nurse wouldn’t go into the infectious diseases ward’**

**CATHERINE**

NURSE, CENTRAL  
LONDON

WE’VE ALWAYS been told to protect ourselves from flu with more robust masks, but we are now having to use flimsier ones. People are worried and don’t know if it’s safe.

The masks are a bit like the very thin ones you would get in an operating theatre.

And there are concerns that we could scale down from the special PPE to other protective clothing when dealing with positive cases.

Without the resources, you have to improvise and compromise. You might not have the special visor, so you find some goggles and use them.

You need training for putting on PPE and there are different procedures for taking and moving swabs for Covid-19.

But at the moment, training is still selective for staff and it happens on an ‘as and when’ basis.

A handful of people had the proper PPE when doing swabs, but on my ward we don’t have it.

Of course we’re ready to do what’s



The safety of domestic staff, porters and cleaners is often an afterthought for hospital managers



# ANXIOUS, EXHAUSTED AND ANGRY

## Health workers speak out!

The coronavirus crisis has laid bare the dire state of Britain’s underfunded NHS. Health workers battling the virus spoke to **Socialist Worker** about the harsh reality of being on the frontline

**Socialist  
Worker  
online**

Socialist Worker online features many articles to help us understand coronavirus and its relationship to capitalism, including:

- We need emergency action
- Anger over unsafe working conditions sparks action
- A virus that exposes the system’s failures—interview with socialist scientist John Parrington
- Drive for profit benefits the spread of disease

Find it all at [socialistworker.co.uk](http://socialistworker.co.uk)

needed. But health workers are not angels living on thin air—there is a huge element of the unknown and people are anxious. Some people are reluctant to do bank agency shifts—one nurse wouldn’t go into infectious diseases and it wasn’t even Covid-19.

Testing health workers for the virus isn’t happening and it’s a real worry. My daughter, who is a university student, has got symptoms of coronavirus. If my child comes home, then I won’t be able to do the shifts that I’m rostered for next week.

We’ve already got a couple of staff who have had to self-isolate and we can’t all not go into work.

The government has created chaos in the NHS in the last decade. How can we now quickly find the shortfall of 40,000 nurses and doctors?

**‘We know how many vulnerable people don’t get adequate care already. Now it’s going to get worse’**

**ANNIE**

PARAMEDIC

WE HAVE never seen anything like this before in the NHS. There is fear everywhere.

In the ambulance service we are incredibly busy. And for many of our patients the main issue is fear. Fear that they have coronavirus, fear they may get it if they go to hospital, fear that they or their loved ones will die.

So we spend entire shifts trying to manage other people’s fears as well as their symptoms. We are trying to treat, reassure and make safe plans with every patient.

But we are afraid too. And we’re angry. We’re angry at the lack of face masks to protect us, the constant struggle to get basic equipment to keep us safe.

We know how much the NHS has



Ambulance crews are often forced to keep potential coronavirus patients on their vehicles until hospitals have space to take them

struggling before this crisis hit. We know how many vulnerable people don’t get adequate social care or support for mental health problems, how terrible living conditions are for some families. Now that is going to get worse.

The government has spent years systematically undermining the health service. We’re sickened by it having the cheek to say the NHS is getting all the resources it needs.

We are also afraid of the risks to ourselves and our families. We get very little information about patients before

we arrive. Despite the call takers’ best efforts we often have no idea what we are walking into.

We are often caught out by patients we think don’t have any Covid-19 symptoms, but then we find out a bit more. Or a child or partner or friend will suddenly walk into the room coughing.

There is no more community testing or contact tracing, so we don’t know which of our patients has the virus.

Unsurprisingly, hospitals are struggling too. When we rush our sickest patients in on blue lights we can’t be sure what we’ll find there—is there a bed or a sideroom available?

Are there enough hospital staff ready and kitted out to receive the patient?

Things are changing every day. We are bombarded with new guidelines and circulars with barely a spare moment to read the updates.

Lots of us are trying to juggle working long shifts with caring for children or elderly relatives, or doing a shopping run for friends and neighbours who are self-isolating.

Those of us active in unions are spending a lot of time and energy trying to organise. We want to ensure the safety of our colleagues and patients, to chase up PPE, to raise difficult questions with management.

We’re tired and anxious and overstretched. But we’re also sustained by a commitment to do our best for our patients and by the strong public support for the NHS.

**‘Not testing NHS staff means no one knows if we are safe or not’**

**VICTORIA**

OCCUPATIONAL  
THERAPIST, EAST LONDON

I’VE BEEN off work for two weeks now, and it’s very frustrating. My two year old daughter developed a cough, so I had to self-isolate. Then as she got better, my eight year old son developed symptoms and I’ve had to extend that isolation.

If I’d been coronavirus tested and cleared, I could be back at work at a time when my hospital really needs me. Not testing staff means no one knows if we are safe or not, and that includes people still working.

When the pressure is on to make way for a large number of new patients, people doing my job are key. As an occupational therapist I help to get patients who are fit out of hospital and back home with the support they need.

At the moment the hospital needs as many side rooms for isolating patients as we can get. But lack of staff is holding up getting existing patients discharged.

And the lack of staff is affecting all patients. Those who are sick with the virus need a lot more staff time because we have to be a lot more careful about infection risk.

Already many staff at my hospital are off sick or self-isolating. It makes me angry that we cannot be tested while MPs and celebrities—who in my opinion are completely worthless—are paying for tests privately.

All names have been changed to protect staff

## WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

### INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

### REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

### THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

### INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism. In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women. We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests. We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

To join us, turn to page 16 or go to [www.swp.org.uk](http://www.swp.org.uk) or phone 020 7840 5602 for more information

## { SOCIALIST WORKER } ONLINE MEETINGS

Weekly meetings to discuss political issues and our local interventions. All welcome.

### BIRMINGHAM

**Socialism in the time of pandemics**

Wed 1 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom 281-634-5938

### BLACK COUNTRY

**Coronavirus—how capitalism makes us sick**

Wed 1 Apr, 7.15pm  
Zoom 604-325-1447

### BOLTON

**Coronavirus—how capitalism makes us sick**

Wed 1 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom 604-325-1447

### BRADFORD

**Get Trump's hands off Palestine**

Thu 2 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom 655-361-711

### BRISTOL

**Socialism in the time of pandemics**

Thu 2 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom 688-397-3148

### BURNLEY & PENDLE

**Coronavirus—how capitalism makes us sick**

Wed 1 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom 446-409-5118

### CAMBRIDGE

**Pandemics, capitalism and crisis**

Thu 2 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom 681-800-4408

### DUNDEE & ABERDEEN

**Protecting workers, not bosses—class and pandemics**

Wed 1 Apr, 8pm  
Zoom 396-573-1805

### EAST MIDLANDS

**Booklaunch—Transgender Resistance, Socialism and the Fight for Trans Liberation with author Laura Miles**

Thu 2 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

828-532-8731

### EDINBURGH

**After the pandemic how can we build a better future?**

Wed 1 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom

677-184-570

### ESSEX

**Coronavirus—how capitalism makes us sick**

Thu 2 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom 633-922-2868

### EXETER

**Pandemics, capitalism and crisis**

Wed 1 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

522-867-7854

### GLASGOW

**Can there be a red in the White House?**

Thu 2 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

810-400-6058

# Socialist Workers Party online meetings



The Socialist Workers Party is holding online meetings during the coronavirus crisis. This is to ensure that there can still be collective local discussion, organising and actions. Most of the meetings will be held using the Zoom system. Download the Zoom app onto your phone or computer and at the time given for your local meeting ask to "Join a meeting".

You can then enter the number printed on this page for the appropriate meeting. Make sure you look at the SWP Facebook page [facebook.com/SocialistWorkersParty](https://facebook.com/SocialistWorkersParty) for news of national online meetings and other updates.

### HUDDERSFIELD

**Coronavirus—how capitalism makes us sick**

Wed 1 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

290-168-1804

### LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE

**Where does racism come from?**

Thu 2 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom 992-204-9372

### LEEDS

**After the pandemic how can we build a better future?**

Thu 2 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

856-912-7408

### LONDON: HACKNEY

**Get Trump's hands off Palestine**

Thu 2 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom

798-534-2585

### LONDON: HARINGEY

**Coronavirus—how should socialists respond?**

Wed 1 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

459-388-1576

### LONDON: ISLINGTON

**Pandemics, capitalism and crisis**

Thu 2 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

874-012-7970

### LONDON: SOUTH EAST

**Universal basic income— is it the answer?**

Wed 1 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom

529-913-6390

### LONDON: TOWER HAMLETS

**Engels—origins of the family**

Wed 1 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom

816-197-924

### LONDON: WALTHAM FOREST

**Too many people? Climate change and the myth of overpopulation**

Wed 1 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom

543-023-057

### LONDON: WEST AND NORTH WEST

**Coronavirus—how capitalism makes us sick**

Thu 2 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom

731-479-3555

### MANCHESTER: CENTRE

**Food, diet and capitalism**

Wed 1 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

910-541-105

### NEWCASTLE

**Politics of the mind—Marxism and mental distress**

Wed 1 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

368-595-7212

### NORWICH

**Pandemics, capitalism and crisis**

Wed 1 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom

906-652-5299

### OXFORD

**Pandemics, capitalism and crisis**

Thu 2 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

476-494-708

### PORTSMOUTH & SOUTHAMPTON

**How the Tories have wrecked our welfare system**

Wed 1 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom

488-934-2809

### SHEFFIELD & SOUTH YORKSHIRE

**Capitalism and the politics of food**

Thu 2 Apr, 7pm  
Zoom

528-174-9278

### YORK & SCARBOROUGH

**Capitalism and the politics of food**

Wed 1 Apr, 7.30pm  
Zoom

827-489-7492

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# Vivarium—a sci-fi thriller where real horror is at home

Claustrophobic, stuck indoors and can't get away from the children. That's the setting for a new film that probes family life, writes **Sarah Bates**

**EVER FELT** like you're stuck at home and can't leave? For gardener Tom and teacher Gemma, this fate is exactly what they're faced with in sci-fi thriller *Vivarium*.

The young couple are looking for a place to live, and are taken to the suburb "Yonder" where all properties look eerily similar.

Forced into desperation by a ridiculous property market, they go along to a house viewing, even ignoring the weird estate agent and setting.

But then they are stuck there. Every attempt to leave the street ends with turning a corner and finding themselves right back where they started.

It's not the coronavirus forcing them to stay at home. It's some sort of supernatural force that prevents them from leaving the street.

Soon they are faced with the biggest challenge of all—to raise an infant to adulthood, on the promise of release upon completion.

## Backbone

Here *Vivarium* slides into a tense domestic drama. Gemma, played brilliantly by rising star Imogen Poots, takes over the daily drudgery of caring for the child.

Gemma is the backbone for the drama in the film's 93 minutes, and her character drives the plot forward.

The sight of her exhausted into submission and collapsed against a spinning washing machine will be a familiar one to many new parents.

Meanwhile Jesse Eisenberg's rather unlikeable Tom focuses his efforts on escape. But he finds time to undermine and ignore Gemma's increasingly panicked pleas for her to help him.

Yonder becomes progressively



**VIVARIUM—PROBABLY** best to leave the house after watching

more claustrophobic, as Tom and Gemma grow physically weaker and the ordeal strains their relationship.

Intimate moments between the pair—a touch on the shoulder, an offer to do the washing up—become rarer as the couple struggle to cope.

The audience is shown precious little about their backstory, and a range of accents—British, Irish and American—make the setting hard to place.

*Vivarium* might not be the best film to watch right now—though perhaps some of their experience

may ring true. It's a bold film, and tries to pose some important questions about domestic life and the weight of society's expectations of people.

If *Vivarium* had focused solely on these themes, probably a more polished film would have emerged.

The sci-fi element of *Vivarium* is noticeably weaker, and misses critical opportunities to build the tension throughout.

But when such moments do arise, they inspire moments of genuine terror, where Gemma is able to

actually challenge her situation, rather than responding with her usual calm passivity.

Here the audience is treated to fleeting glimpses of the otherworldly context of Yonder. But these moments are seconds long—far too short to inject a real sense of what Gemma and Tom are battling.

So *Vivarium* is worth a watch. But it might be more comfortable viewing if you can go outside afterwards and feel the fresh air.

*Vivarium* is set to be released on 27 March

## Congo is setting for lively and chilling history novel

### BOOK

#### THE DEATH OF COMRADE PRESIDENT

by Alain Mabanckou  
Serpent's Tail, £14.99

SET IN the People's Republic of Congo in 1977, Mabanckou's novel is based on real events.

Young Michel lives with Maman Pauline and Papa Roger in a small house in the city of Point-Noire.

His world explodes when the country's head, Comrade President Marien Ngouabi, is murdered and the army begins a purge

of those linked to the slain leader.

Mabanckou, who was born in Point-Noire, has written a series of celebrated novels.

This one focuses on a prominent thread in his work—colonialism, the hopes and disappointments of independence, and the continuing influence of former imperial powers.

Michel and Papa Roger don't expect to find the truth from the local radio so they tune in to Voice of America. This reveals the machinations of



Alain Mabanckou

the French regime, but studiously avoids any mention of the new power on the block—the US.

Michel is very aware of the "black capitalists" who "carefully count the number of mouths to be fed" if you turn up at their house unannounced.

He knows that as he surveys Africa it seems that "misery always hides behind the door marked 'joy'"—and that it's best not to expect too much good in the world.

The book acts as a history lesson about the experience of several

central African regimes.

But it also remains a story of believable individuals who are caught up in the sweep of events beyond their control.

Some react appallingly and selfishly, others discover new reserves of resistance and courage.

In the closing scenes Michel must choose between telling the truth or lying in order to protect his mother's life.

It is a novel that is at times comic, at times chilling—and well worth reading.

**Charlie Kimber**

### PAINTING

#### ABEL RODRIGUEZ

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. Free online at [baltic.art](http://baltic.art) while gallery is closed due to coronavirus

THE BALTIC modern art gallery in Gateshead is "closed physically, open digitally".

A new exhibition, now available on the gallery's website, showcases paintings by indigenous Colombian artist Abel Rodriguez. It includes new work created specifically for the exhibition.

Rodriguez's work is grounded in his ancestral knowledge of the indigenous plants of the region.

In the 1990s, armed conflict and the exploitation of natural resources in



the rainforest displaced Rodriguez and his family. They moved to Bogota, the country's capital.

As a way to preserve his knowledge and memory of his region, Rodriguez creates detailed paintings and drawings.

They depict the ecosystem of the rainforest in the Nonuya region with intricate details of the flora and fauna.

Rodriguez's precise, botanical illustrations are drawn from memory and knowledge acquired by oral transmission.

His studies teach us the natural cycle of the rainforest and its inhabitants, plants, animals, humans and other beings.

In his series *Ciclo de la chagra* (Cycle of the agricultural plots) he details the plants cultivated by the Muinane indigenous people of Colombia.

This series is an important document that presents agricultural and symbolic knowledge.

It includes the rotation of crops, how the crops are grouped and placed within plots of cultivated land and which animals eat the fruits or leaves.

Since 2008, Rodriguez's works started to be acknowledged for their artistic value and featured in exhibitions.

This online exhibition includes a slideshow tour of the exhibition, and the film *ABEL*, by Fernando Arias.

**WHAT kind of society could cope with coronavirus? As is becoming increasingly obvious—not capitalism.**

Covid-19 reveals the limitations of our current system. One of capitalism's central problems is a lack of democratic rational planning in the interests of the vast majority.

The bosses' system is a chaotic one—where individual firms or single governments compete for resources in the pursuit of profit.

Firms relate to each other through the market based on what's profitable, not what we need or the environment can sustain.

So, for example, the search for a vaccine for Covid-19 is left to dozens of competing pharmaceutical companies.

There are elements of planning under capitalism, but it is done by a minority to protect their power and wealth.

The US project to build the first atomic bomb coordinated the work of 130,000 people across three countries. But that was done for war—for destruction, not construction.

Today the supermarkets have created a highly detailed and planned scheme of just-in-time deliveries to their stores.

That's good for eliminating cost and boosting revenue. It's very bad when there's a relatively small rise in demand and all the shelves are empty.

And rather than capitalism driving forward innovation, it actually holds back progress.

Sars was another form of coronavirus that caused a pandemic in 2002-3.

If all those working on treatment for Sars had remained commissioned for the past 18 years we might be further down the road towards a cure for this latest manifestation.

Instead they were moved on to more profitable work.

Two Italian tech firms 3D-printed ventilator valves last week when the Chiara hospital was running out of supplies.

But one of the firms, Isinnova, was threatened with legal action by the company that held the blueprints for the original ventilator design.

**SOCIALISM would mean drawing up plans based on matching society's resources and society's needs. There would not be the obstacle of profit.**

Deciding what we need, how it can be produced in harmony with the environment, what should be distributed free now and what wages should be paid are all questions that involve intense democratic involvement.

But developments under capitalism have made this easier. The internet and forms of mass communication will make it much simpler to coordinate activity, assess plans on the basis



A TRADER on the Kuwait stock exchange watches prices plummet

# BREAK FROM CHAOS OF CAPITALISM

A society based on democratic planning could meet the needs of everyone and boost innovation. **Socialist Worker** looks at how ordinary people could reshape our world



Karl Marx

of widespread information, and register our views and votes

A great myth is that ordinary people are too stupid or lack the necessary experience to organise society themselves.

The immediate response to coronavirus shows this isn't true. Mutual aid groups have been set up across Britain, often with no input from formal local or national government structures.

It was a similar story when extreme flooding hit parts of Yorkshire and South Wales in February. Emergency aid was organised by neighbourhoods and community groups who



**Ordinary people have the skills, experience and solidarity to help others in desperate situations**

identified the need for food parcels, child care, medicine collection and so on.

The community response to the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 is another example of how local residents organised the collection and distribution of aid, supported survivors seeking accommodation and coordinated relief efforts.

In each of these cases, ordinary people show they have the skills, experience and solidarity needed to help others in desperate situations.

And this isn't something that happens in reaction to a single,

horrific event. Across society, and throughout history, there are countless examples of ordinary people organising together and challenging a system that attempts to grind them down.

Revolutionary movements, from Russia in 1917, to Iran in 1979 and Egypt in 2011, show that it's possible to take on our rulers.

And every revolutionary movement raises the question of running society in a new and planned way.

In the Paris Commune of 1871 the mechanics and metal workers' unions argued that equality meant "economic emancipation" which "can only be attained through the formation of workers' associations, which alone can transform our position from that of wage earners to that of associates".

**THE COMMUNE set minimum wages and set maximum prices. It experimented with new forms of decision-making and justice.**

It was from his observations of the Paris Commune that the revolutionary Karl Marx saw that the organisation of a future society could grow out of resistance to the old society.

Beyond the organising capabilities that see activists organise food parcels and emergency aid, people are also able to fight together to re-engineer the economy so that it serves need not profit.

The coronavirus crisis is already throwing up questions of how work is organised.

For instance, the postal workers' CWU union is arguing that its members in Royal Mail could form an "additional emergency service".

The union argues that workers could deliver medical aid, check on those self-isolating and deliver food bank parcels.

But if Royal Mail is going to be an additional emergency service, there needs to be reorganisation and coordination with local authorities.

Currently, what gets delivered and when is mostly decided by postal bosses and the firms that pay for deliveries.

But the coronavirus crisis offers an opportunity for postal workers to demand that all commercial post is halted, and decide to focus their efforts on delivering necessities and health information.

This could only be done fully by a publicly-owned and democratically controlled service, not a private firm. It would require elements of workers' control.

Democratic planning could transform work under a socialist society.

For a start, it would get rid of the waste and competition that exists on every level of the system.

Production of goods and services in society that aren't useful, such as weapons, would be stopped.

The health service would need to be planned with the input of the whole of the working class. But it would be managed by workers.

Instead of a "postcode lottery" deciding on whether your child goes to a good school or a safe hospital, socialist planning would mean good services and infrastructure throughout society.

It would mean an end to a system where a tiny minority of people sit at the top of society exploiting the masses of ordinary people.

When resources are shared out fairly, these bankers and bosses won't be able to hoard investments, mansions and yachts while most people struggle to get by.

When workers truly have this economic and political control, they will be able to discuss and vote on the production and allocation of resources—with transformative results.

Workplace councils or neighbourhood assemblies could elect delegates to make decisions.

Bigger decisions would need national or regional bodies.

Critically, these would be filled with people who would be affected by the outcomes of any decisions made—not the millionaire politicians who cut our health service or slash council funding.

And to survive, any burgeoning socialist society—and major planning—would have to be international.

**PLANNING ON a scale beyond capitalist nation states has obvious advantages. In the first instance, it would help allocate resources to cope with a health emergency such as coronavirus that carries no passport and respects no borders.**

It would bring together discoveries and innovation from across the world.

In contrast, the sanctions and trade wars driven by capitalist rivalries have been intensified even as Covid-19 sweeps the world.

The US has stepped up its squeeze on Iran, limiting its ability to contain the pandemic.

And only international, rational, planning will be able to challenge climate catastrophe.

For example, there could be a large scale rolling out of renewable energy, and cuts in carbon emissions.

## READ MORE

● **Unravelling Capitalism: A Guide to Marxist Political Economy** by Joseph Choonara, £8.99

● **The Revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx** by Alex Callinicos, £8

Available at Bookmarks, the socialist bookshop. Phone 020 7637 1848 or go to [bookmarksbookshop.co.uk](http://bookmarksbookshop.co.uk)



A graveyard for airliners shows the chaos and waste of production under capitalism (top). Workers in Russia at a factory meeting in 1917 (above)

Under the current system of short term competition and pursuit of profit, it doesn't make sense for individual countries to take this course of action.

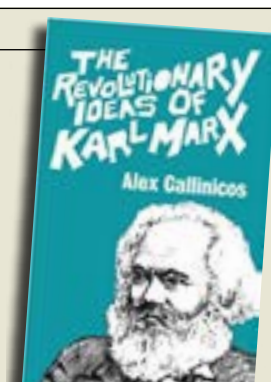
Ultimately, there's no blueprint for this socialist world, and the exact form will only be known to those who create it.

Russia after the 1917 revolution began to offer a glimpse of a better world. But it was militarily and economically crushed by collaborating capitalist governments who feared similar movements would crush their rule.

The Stalinist system that grew on the wreckage of the revolution planned the economy undemocratically in the interests of a new class of bureaucrats and state officials, not the majority.

As capitalism fails we need to argue over the immediate issues we face. But it's also essential to demand that there can be no return to business as usual.

Instead there needs to be a fight for a completely different world.



## FOCUS ON THE CRISIS

# The 'national interest' is not the interest of workers

During times of turmoil, the ruling class will tell us to come together. Behind this is the drive to keep making profits writes Nick Clark

WE SHOULD all be very suspicious of talk of putting Britain on a war-like footing to deal with the coronavirus enemy.

The Tories' hope is that this mythical Blitz spirit and feeling of national togetherness will unite everyone behind a government that's only out for the rich.

In reality, advocating that people collaborate in the way the government wants will help take the responsibility off the Tories.

Boris Johnson and his chancellor Rishi Sunak have deliberately tried to portray themselves as the Winston Churchills of the hour.

And by and large the media have helped them. Meanwhile the Labour Party has shied away from tearing the Tories down for putting the lives of ordinary people at risk to protect the interests of the rich.

Under the pressure of a society in crisis, Labour has chosen to play the role of loyal opposition.

## Prove

It hopes to prove it has the "national interest" at heart—and to hint that maybe that national interest would be better served by a Labour government instead.

A "responsible" Labour MP might decide that now isn't the time to bring down a Tory government.

They might even think that it's time to join it. The New Statesman website reported that some Labour MPs are dreaming of a national government, joining the Tories as the junior partner of a coalition.

Yet the national interest boils down to giving the rich what they want.

The rest of us, who don't share those interests, are made to suffer. The financial



PROPAGANDA TO keep us 'together'

## BACK STORY

**Governments, both Labour and Tory, have given away billions to businesses and banks while working class people go without**

● In 2008 the Labour government gave around £500 billion to bail out the banks in a single day during the financial crisis

● The Tories handed around £250 billion to businesses in loans and grants last week.

● They say such measures are in the national interest, but it's bosses who benefit

crisis is a good example.

In the name of the national interest, Labour and Tory governments gave billions to the bankers and austerity to the rest of us.

It was a solution for the rich, and a punishment for working class people. And the Tories want to take the same approach when it comes to the coronavirus outbreak

For most people, a solution to the coronavirus is one



**The class war doesn't stop even when everything else in society seemingly has**

that focuses on protecting everyone's health and making sure no one goes without.

For the Tories and the rich, the solution is about making sure their system can survive. For them the big fear is that the profits will stop flowing. For us it's that our lives are crashing to a halt.

That division shows up constantly in every aspect of life.

Is your manager telling you to come in when you know you should stay home?

Is your billionaire employer going to stop your pay? Is your landlord going to evict you if you can't pay the rent?

## Solutions

The class war doesn't stop, even when everything else in society seemingly has. Our solutions have to put that war at the centre.

That's why what Labour proposes its members do—organise food banks—isn't enough.

If there's no class struggle involved, it lets the government and the rich off the hook.

Even worse, the left gets co-opted by them. So if you're thinking of organising deliveries, let's also organise to demand the government makes sure everyone has the food and medicine they need.

The coronavirus crisis is going to deepen the division between those at the top and the rest of us.

We should grasp that to try and win real changes in society, not try to smooth it over.

# Did British state collude in torture in Libya?

by SIMON BASKETTER

**THE BROTHER** of the Manchester Arena bomber was tortured and it is unclear what Boris Johnson knew about it.

Hashem Abedi's conviction of 22 counts of murder means some aspects of his case can now be reported.

Abedi had denied helping to plan the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017.

He was in Libya when the bomb was detonated, but he was "just as guilty" as his brother according to the prosecution.

It took over two years for Britain to secure his extradition. The government paid over £9 million in what the defence called "bribery" aid to get it.

Abedi was extradited in July 2019, almost two years after Johnson—the then foreign secretary—visited Tripoli and offered millions to help Libya deal with "terrorism and migration".

Abedi's barrister, Stephen Kamlish, told the court that, "The British were effectively having to bribe the Libyans."



**HASHEM ABEDI**—kept in solitary confinement, shackled and blindfolded

After their arrest, Abedi and his father were held by the Rada Special Deterrence Force, a militia, at its base at Mitiga airport in Tripoli.

Shackled, blindfolded and held in solitary confinement, Abedi was forced to sign a

40-page confession with a fingerprint under "extreme duress".

"He was held at the airport, which was—and it must have been known to the British government—a notorious torture establishment

where people are known to have been tortured and killed," said Kamlish.

His allegation of torture were supported by medical evidence, including photographs taken by a British consular official showing

marks on his back, arms and ankles. He also received treatment for a groin injury.

Kamlish said MI5 and MI6 officers who visited him twice at the detention centre must have known Abedi was being tortured but continued to feed questions to his torturers.

He said, "He was arrested the day after the bombing, and until the end of May he was asked questions about people in Manchester and addresses, none of which could have been known to his torturers."

"They must have received the questions from either Operation Manteline [the name of the Manchester bombing investigation] or the security services or both."

## Custody

Abedi's older brother, Ismail, who remained in Britain, told the British government that his sibling and father were being tortured in Libyan custody—in truth they already knew.

At one point, Kamlish said, British intelligence officers questioned Abedi in the presence of members of the

militia that was allegedly torturing him. After Abedi signed the confession on 23 June 2017 the worst of the torture ceased, the court was told.

The prosecution did not deny the allegation of British complicity in Abedi's torture but went on to successfully argue that his trial should proceed regardless of his treatment in Tripoli.

During the "War on Terror" British spies were repeatedly involved with torture, often at a slight distance.

They would usually provide the questions for someone else to do the beating.

British governments have denied involvement in torture. This is despite repeated evidence to the contrary and settling compensation cases out of court.

Parliament's intelligence and security committee confirmed in 2018 that MI5 and MI6 officers had engaged in human rights abuses, but concluded these abuses were a historical issue.

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## IN BRIEF

**Delivery drivers could walk out**

DHL DELIVERY workers are gearing up for a series of strikes over pay and working conditions.

Unite union members in the North West of England and the West Midlands are set to strike on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of next week. The DHL drivers work at Jaguar Land Rover factories. They are based in Ellesmere Port, Evans Road and Halewood in the North West and Tyrefort, Midpoint and Hams Hall in the West Midlands.

**Charity action off over corona crisis**

WORKERS AT rehabilitation charity We Are With You—formerly Addaction—have put further industrial action on hold until after the coronavirus crisis.

Unison union members in Wigan and Leigh have been fighting to get NHS pay and terms and conditions.

They were outsourced from the NHS to the charity, which runs the alcohol and drug rehabilitation service on a contract to the Labour-run council.

**Lewish hospital workers not paid**

SUPPORT WORKERS at Lewisham hospital in south east London still haven't been given unpaid wages by subcontractor ISS.

The cleaning and catering workers held an unofficial walkout and lunchtime protest at earlier this month.

Some of the GMB union members weren't paid the full amount they were owed at the end of February.

They walked out after they saw that the company still hadn't coughed up by the time of their next pay cheque.

**Tube unions agree four-year pay deal**

UNIONS AND Transport for London bosses have agreed a four-year pay deal for Tube workers. The RMT union was balloting for strikes by around 10,000 workers on the London Underground.

Details of the deal were unavailable as Socialist Worker went to press on Tuesday. Issues around working conditions remain unresolved.

**Millions wasted liquidating airline**

A NEW report has revealed that the Tory government spent at least £156 million on the collapse of travel firm Thomas Cook last September.

Unite assistant general secretary Diana Holland said, "The government's failure to support the highly profitable Thomas Cook airline to continue to fly has once again been shown to be an error."

## VIRUS



**THE PAUSE the System** group staged a protest outside Downing Street last week to demand action on coronavirus

PICTURE: THE PAUSE THE SYSTEM

## EDUCATION

# Don't put universities fight on 'back burner'

by SADIE ROBINSON

A NUMBER of UCU union branches called off planned strikes in universities last week as the coronavirus crisis grew.

UCU members are in dispute over pay, equality, workload, contracts and pensions. Workers across 74 universities held a series of successful walkouts as part of the disputes.

And reballos for more strikes were set to start at scores of universities last week.

But the union postponed the reballos as more and more universities ended face to face teaching due to the virus.

Workers are now organising to make sure that bosses don't use the crisis to ram through further attacks.

But some are also feeling in a relatively powerful position.

The UCU Left group, which Socialist Worker supports, said university bosses "know they need our cooperation and flexibility in order to keep even a depleted form of education up and running".

It said it was "not surprising" that some strikes were called off last week.

But it added, "It is regrettable that the general secretary and others intervened to amplify some voices rather than others in



**Pickets outside UCL in central London**

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

these debates and advocated overriding normal decision-making processes.

"We have a deficit of democracy that must be corrected."

It warned that casualised staff could be the first victims of the crisis as bosses use the end of face to face teaching "to justify mass layoffs".

**Cleaners**

And it feared bosses trying to further push down pay and conditions.

"Already, managers are busy devising new ways to impose their control on us at home," it said.

"The appetite for the fight has been overtaken by events. But this is likely to be only a temporary respite.

"The crisis carries within it

the seeds of new threats and new attacks." And there's a danger that bosses will try to make some changes permanent if they find it saves them cash.

"The HE market may well allow space for an expanded segment of online providers staffed by a gig economy of casualised workers," it warned.

UCU Left urged union activists to find new ways of organising, including online, to continue to defend workers' rights during the crisis over coronavirus.

"We need to prepare for the struggles to reignite," it said.

"This is not the time to put the issues we have been fighting over on the back burner for the sake of the national interest.

"We are not all in it together."

## Celebrate resistance with Socialist Worker this May Day

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## SIXTH FORMS

## 'Our dispute is not over,' say sixth form strikers

TWO contradictory developments in the sixth form colleges dispute crashed into one another last week. The first was news that the NEU union's reballos of workers at 50 colleges in our long-running fight over pay and funding was working.

Tory laws forced a reballos on us after six months of the dispute, but we escalated by including more colleges than in the first round.

Interim data after the first week of voting showed that we were on track to meet the 50 percent turnout threshold required by law.

Yet on the same day, the coronavirus crisis surged. After weeks of dithering, the Tory government was forced to close the schools and the colleges.

**Simple**

So the ballot was called off for the simple reason that you can't double-close a college.

So where does that leave union organisation in the colleges? And what does it mean for our dispute?

So where does that leave union organisation in the colleges? What does it mean for our dispute?

The rapidly changing situation around coronavirus means there won't be an answer next week or the week after.

However, there are answers buried in the dispute and possibilities opened up



**East London strikers**

by the very dynamism of the viral spread. Our pay and funding issue is fundamental and bitter.

We want to be paid the same as school teachers and we hate that our students have been hammered by cuts. An 18 year-old student has been suffering all their academic life from austerity.

NEU members in sixth form colleges are well organised. We have strong local groups and strong unofficial national organisations.

That is how we got the union to ballot us last summer, and how we got colleges on strike in the autumn term.

The ballot is over, but the dispute is not over and we are not over. We still need a pay rise and we need properly funded colleges to open in the autumn.

**Duncan Blackie, vice chair of the NEU post-16 council and an NEU rep at a Sheffield college**

## SCHOOLS

THE NEU education union has called for the government to make testing education staff for coronavirus a priority.

The move comes after the government announced that schools would close—but that many will remain open to support the children of key workers. Joint general

secretary of the NEU Mary Boustead said that more testing was "absolutely crucial for the efficient and safe functioning of the education service".

"There won't be enough education staff available for work on school sites if all members with symptoms are forced to self-isolate,"

she said. Union activists are demanding more measures to protect the safety of children and staff in schools. These include more deep cleans, masks and other equipment.

Activists are also demanding that workers should have a say in how the schools are run.

## INDUSTRIAL NOTE

## Strikes during coronavirus

AT SOCIALIST Worker we pride ourselves on our coverage of strikes, protests and reports of working class struggle against the Tories and bosses.

We follow disputes from ballots to the picket lines.

But during the coronavirus crisis we cannot guarantee that reports of planned strikes will be accurate by the time you read the paper.

Many strikes are being called off and many will not include picket lines.

# New laws give dangerous new powers to the state

The Tories rushed through new laws to ‘deal’ with coronavirus—but far from being necessary to keep us safe they’re a threat to us all, says **Gabby Thorpe**

**THE TORIES** want to use the coronavirus outbreak to grab more repressive powers for cops and border officials.

Their Emergency Coronavirus Bill, which they rushed through the House of Commons on Monday, is the biggest expansion of state powers outside of times of war.

It’s presented as a package of temporary emergency measures—and is being accepted as necessary by people who should know better than to trust the Tories.

In reality the bill is an attempt to force through major, permanent changes that give police, border cops and spooks more powers to spy on people and lock them up.

That’s especially bad news for black people, Muslims and people suffering mental distress.

And it has rightly alarmed anti-racists and human rights campaigners.

Martha Spurrier, director of the human rights watchdog Liberty, said, “The changes they are suggesting are not tweaks, they are a drastic reimagining of state powers.”

## Cops

For a start the bill will give cops more powers to lock people up for no reason.

The government has said police and immigration officers will be able to arrest anyone who “is, or may be, infectious” and take them to a “suitable place” for assessment.

Anyone deemed “potentially infectious” can be detained for up to 48 hours, or 12 hours by immigration officials, while they undergo a screening.

On top that, the bill also makes it easier to lock up indefinitely anyone



THE TORIES want cops to have more powers in a society shaped by coronavirus

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

suffering mental distress. It wants to change mental health legislation to allow patients to be detained and treated with one doctor’s consent.

Currently two doctors’ opinions are needed in order to do this.

And the bill would allow “extension or removal of time limits” on their detention.

Both of these changes are sure to be used in a racist way.

The emergency powers will further open the door for Britain’s institutionally racist police force to harass black people and people suffering mental distress.

Black people in England and Wales

are already nine times more likely to be stopped and searched by police.

That rises to 40 times more likely under powers that allow cops to stop people without any grounds for suspicion.

There’s a similar threat aimed at Muslims under provisions that make it easier for cops and spooks to snoop on people.

New powers will make it easier for the government to appoint officials to approve security services’ requests to access people’s data.

That means being allowed to hack people’s phones and computers, tap their calls, read their messages or see

their internet history.

And the length of time that cops will get to spy on people will be increased.

Currently they can use these powers for up to three days before being reviewed.

Now it will be 12.

Cops and spooks always use terror attacks to demand increased powers to spy on Muslims.

Now they’re using the coronavirus outbreak to force through more repressive measures.

We wouldn’t stand for it at any other time—and we shouldn’t accept it now.

## Detainees must be set free now

**THE** coronavirus bill will give the same powers to detain people to immigration officers as it does to the cops.

That means anyone coming into the country could find themselves locked up for no reason—another threat to mostly Muslims and black people.

The home secretary will also get the power to close Britain’s borders. Yet rather than locking people up in places where infection can spread, the safest thing is to release people.

Migrants’ rights campaigners have called for the Tories to “immediately” release all detainees after possible coronavirus cases were found in the Colnbrook immigration removal detention centre.

## Vulnerable adults at risk

**IT’S** not just potential sufferers that the Tories want to lock away.

They also want to water down the Care Act 2014, which sets out local authorities’ obligations to safeguarding adults at risk of abuse or neglect.

The move would allow local authorities to prioritise the services they offer.

The Tories admit this would apply “even if this means not meeting everyone’s assessed needs in full or delaying some assessments”.

# Mistake for Labour to gives thumbs up to Tory plans

**ATTEMPTS** by the government to hand themselves extra repressive powers must be resisted.

The Tory government has said that the powers in the bill will not last for more than two years.

But if they’re allowed to hand themselves those powers, then there is no guarantee that they will not extend that period of time as they see fit.

Given the extent of the powers, it’s no surprise that the Tories want to rush them through into

law before anything can stop them.

They wanted parliament to nod them all through on Monday of this week without a vote.

That means that major repressive powers only published last week will already be law by the time Socialist Worker goes to press.

Yet disgracefully, the Labour Party looked set to go along with this.

In a letter to Boris Johnson, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn—known



Jeremy Corbyn is going along with Boris Johnson

as someone who’s campaigned against repressive state powers—backed the government.

“People understand the need for temporary restrictions to our way of life,” he wrote.

He only meekly called for MPs to get a vote on whether to renew the laws once every six months—a demand so minor that the Tories accepted it.

It’s a dangerous failure by the Labour Party to agree to such serious attacks on the rights of ordinary people.

## Keeping track via your phone

**BRITAIN’S** chief scientific advisor, Patrick Vallance said last week that the government could start using location data gathered from phones in order to monitor people.

The Tories have already been accused of asking mobile phone company O2 to provide anonymous tracking data to the government.

Access to location data would allow the government to check whether people are staying at home during the outbreak.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

# Success for battling Bexley bin workers

by TOMÁŠ TENGEY-EVANS

**BIN WORKERS** in south east London won health and safety demands over coronavirus after a walkout on Wednesday of last week.

Unite union members in Bexley walked out to demand higher pay from the subcontractor Serco.

They were angry that they got paid up to £4 an hour less than colleagues in the neighbouring borough of Greenwich.

Willie Howard, a Unite organiser, said workers had “agreed to postpone their industrial action after a massive victory guaranteeing full sick pay to any worker forced to isolate or take time off because of coronavirus”.

## Solid

“This concession from Serco and the council only came after rock-solid action that saw a total disruption to its efforts to break the strike,” he added.

Workers have vowed to keep up the fight over pay in the future. Howard said, “Let it be known that when this



BEXLEY BIN workers discuss their action

PICTURE: WILLIE HOWARD

crisis is over we won't tolerate going back to a regime of zero hours contracts, poverty pay and no sick pay.

“Now more than ever we see the real value of those workers so recently dismissed as ‘unskilled’.”

He added, “The strike over pay was no longer tenable

with people rapidly becoming ill.

“But we've set a benchmark for the future when this is all over.

“Stand up and fight back against a lack of sick pay.”

Meanwhile, bin workers on the Wirral on Merseyside are being balloted for strikes

over pay. The Unite union members, who work for subcontractor Biffa, could walk out straight after the Easter holiday if they vote for strikes.

The union said it would confirm any industrial action after the ballot ended on Wednesday of this week.

## TOWER HAMLETS

# Tower Hamlets strike called off due to virus, but the battle for justice continues

**THOUSANDS OF** workers in east London have called off a strike that would have seen council services and schools grind to a halt.

Around 4,000 council and school workers in Tower Hamlets were due to walk out on 24 March, 1 and 2 April.

The workers, who are members of the Unison and NEU unions, are battling the “Tower Rewards” programme that included a raft of attacks.

But the trade unionists agreed to suspend the action in light of the pressure facing council and school services amid the coronavirus outbreak.

John McLoughlin, Tower Hamlets Unison secretary, told Socialist Worker that they “were left with no choice” but to suspend the action. “In the context of

Covid-19 we are willing to work collaboratively with the council,” he said.

As recently as a week ago, trade unionists were planning for mass rallies and picket lines during the strike.

But pressure on council services and a long list of exempted or isolated workers from the walkout means that trade unionists felt the action would have been untenable.

## Cuts

John said that the coronavirus emergency was happening against a backdrop of cuts to services and jobs that would have eased some of the strain.

“Our Meals on Wheels service shut in February—that’s a service that would be essential if it were still open,” he said.

A key element of the Tower Rewards is the council plans to slash severance and redundancy pay.

So workers who are deemed essential in delivering critical services to vulnerable people face being sacked “on the cheap” if the plans go through.

John said that workers “remain committed to our dispute”.

“But we recognise that the Covid-19 crisis is the most pressing thing facing not just us but the whole of humanity,” he said.

“We will play our role in getting through this crisis, but the issues are not settled.

“When we get through this, we demand that working people won't pay for the corona crisis.”

Sarah Bates

## LIBRARIES

# Lambeth walkout shows how to fight back at work

>>>continued from page 20 number of weekend workers email us and join the union.

“We won't go back until they guarantee us safe working conditions.”

THE UNITE union has slammed a decision to keep libraries open in Bromley, south London.

It said Greenwich Leisure Limited, which runs the libraries, should close them with full pay for staff.

The Central Library in Bromley is closed. But others, such as Burnt Ash Library, are still advertising events in the library over the coming week.

UNIVERSITY staff are challenging moves by management to keep campus libraries open during the coronavirus crisis.

Pressure from workers at some institutions, such as at Soas, University of London, has forced some libraries to close.

A petition that has been launched says keeping university libraries open “represents a severe public health threat to library workers, facilities staff, students and the public”.

Sign the petition to close university libraries at [bit.ly/LibrarySign](http://bit.ly/LibrarySign)

## ROYAL MAIL



In Portishead near Bristol campaigning for the strike vote

PICTURE: CWU BRISTOL

# It is no time for a truce with bullying post bosses

**WALKOUTS BY** postal workers on Monday in Bridgwater in Somerset and Southwark in south London underlined the angry mood among post workers.

Nationally Royal Mail workers delivered yet another overwhelming vote to strike on Tuesday of last week.

But their CWU union leaders decided not to announce dates for action, instead calling for a truce with bosses over coronavirus.

CWU leaders Dave Ward and Terry Pullinger said Royal Mail should become an “additional emergency service” during the outbreak.

## Medical

This would mean postal workers delivering medical aid, checking on older and vulnerable people, delivering local services and supporting people working from home.

It would also mean helping with food parcel deliveries.

Union officials were still in talks with bosses on Monday of this week. Yet workers had heard nothing of the bosses' response—including confirmation that they would stop attempts to ram through changes that would slash thousands of jobs.

CWU members were also complaining that managers were asking them to carry on

working in unsafe conditions.

This included sorting mail at close quarters with other workers, and not being provided with gloves or hand sanitiser. Others were frustrated that their work had so far carried on as normal, including being made to do door to door deliveries.

One commented, “Unfortunately with Royal Mail it is just business as usual. No sanitiser, no social distancing—it is simply unacceptable.”

Another said, “World crisis and we are getting hammered with junk mail!”

“I've no problem going the extra mile at this time when you're delivering vital letters and parcels. But going to doors with just leaflets is ridiculous.”

Becoming an additional emergency service cannot mean business as usual—or a truce with bosses who will want to keep delivering leaflets and bills for the companies that pay for them.

Workers and union members know best what services they should deliver—they must have a say over how this is organised.

The union has to be prepared to refuse to deliver items such as junk mail—and to walk out if conditions are unsafe.

# NO CARE FOR THE ILL OR THE INFIRM

by YURI PRASAD

**THE GOVERNMENT has said that around 1.5 million people in England are in so much danger due to coronavirus they must “take themselves out of society”.**

Those with certain long term health conditions were instructed not to leave their houses for any reason from now on.

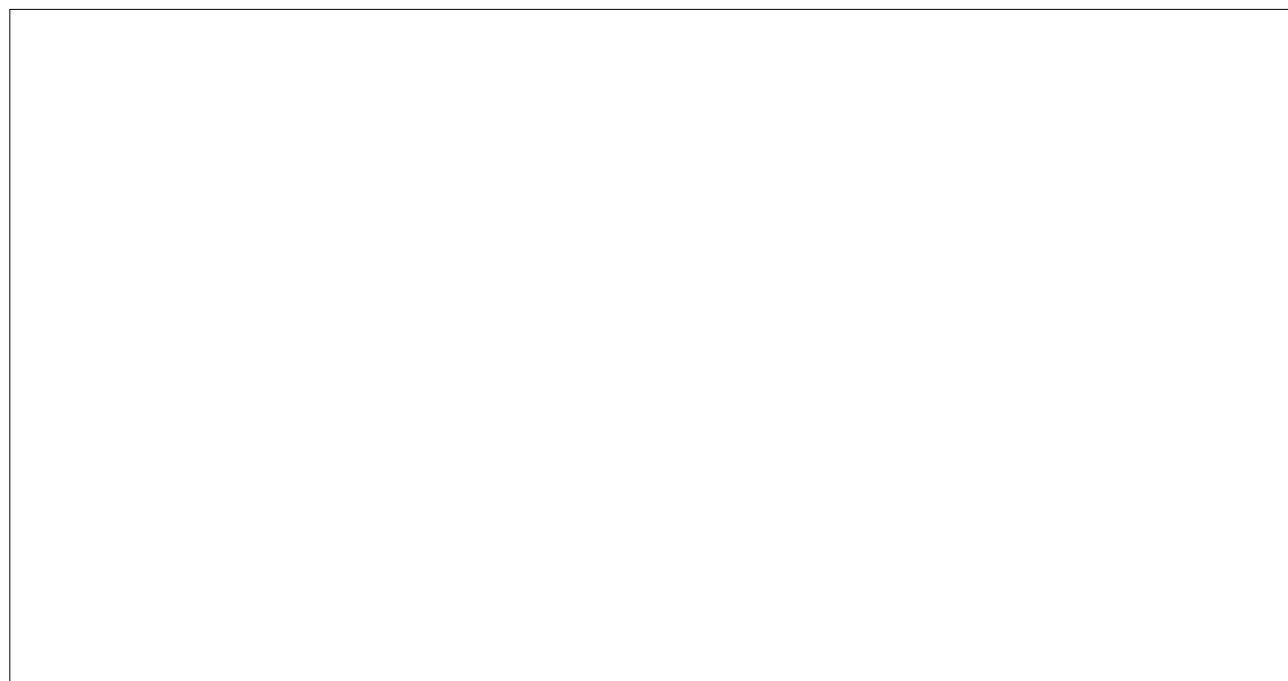
Some 40 percent of the people listed by the government are aged 75 or older—and many of them are already extremely isolated.

Ministers say that shopping can be done on the internet or bought by friendly neighbours and left on doorsteps.

They say medicines can be delivered by local chemists, and that social media will help people battling depression and loneliness.

And, if all that fails, in some cases local authorities will step in.

This is crass nonsense. Those capable of ordering supplies online will soon find that it is impossible to get a



**SOME 40 percent of those told not to leave the house for any reason are aged 75 and over**

delivery slot for their shopping. Pharmacies will not have the ability to drop their medicines round.

And it's going to take more than Skype calls to help

people through the next three months of “social shielding”.

The government knows that councils already cannot cope with the social care needs of thousands of

sick and disabled people. Yet somehow they will be expected to manage many more. That's why their Coronavirus Bill plans the suspension of the Care Act

2014 (see page 17). The act puts a legal duty upon local authorities to meet the eligible needs of disabled people and their carers.

Instead of cutting

protection for sick and disabled people, we need immediately to step up the level of care. Those who are already without food and medicines need urgent action.

The government says the army will be used to deliver food and medicines to the most vulnerable, and that those deemed most at risk will be contacted.

There is much more that the government could do.

Royal Mail's delivery network should be commandeered to bring parcels of groceries and arrange pick-ups from chemists and hospitals.

The emotional and psychological pressure on those made vulnerable to the virus by their illness is already immense.

They must be made to feel that they are they are valuable members of society, and that the state will properly support them.

For that to happen, the government must be forced to take far more action than simply announcing ever greater degrees of crackdown.

## Walkout shuts down ten south London libraries after virus safety fears

by SADIE ROBINSON

STAFF AT ten libraries in Lambeth, south London, walked out on Friday of last week and refused to return over coronavirus fears.

Unison union members said conditions mean the libraries are unsafe for staff and library users.

“It was a hard decision because we care about our library users,” said one worker who walked out in Brixton. “But we also care about their safety and ours.”

“We don't have hand sanitiser and there are no wipes for the keyboards and touch screens.”

Tim is the Unison shop



**Workers outside Brixton library**

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

steward for libraries in Lambeth. He told Socialist Worker, “We had been in meetings with management discussing how we could run a reduced service.”

“This would look at how we could still support housebound library users, people who needed to use computers for job applications and so on.”

“We had an agreement that we would move to a service run for two hours a day to try and promote the service as best we could.”

“But this morning, we were informed that the council gold command wanted all the libraries to stay open.”

A message on Brixton

library's Facebook page posted on Saturday said libraries were closing “to keep our customers safe”.

It failed to mention that workers' action had brought about the closure.

Workers are furious that Lambeth council seemed prepared to put them and library visitors at risk.

### Unsupervised

“There's no hand gel and no wipes,” said Tim. “In some places, people can't go and wash their hands because that would mean leaving the library unsupervised.”

“Yesterday we had someone with mental health issues sneezing on everyone.”

“Some members of the

public got angry and the police were called. The stress of the situation is too much for some people and staff are not safe.”

In a statement, Lambeth Unison said workers were walking out under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

This provides workers with the right to withdraw from and refuse to return to a workplace that is unsafe.

Workers decided to take the action after discussing the situation via email and voting to walk out.

“We tried to talk to management about this all day, but they blanked us,” said Tim. “We've had a

>>>continued on page 19